

THE GHENT CENTRE FOR BUDDHIST STUDIES (GCBS) PERMANENT TRAINING IN BUDDHIST STUDIES PRESENTS:

A PUBLIC TALK BY ALEX MENG, UNIVERSITEIT LEIDEN

## POET'S MYTHS: ASURAS IN AŚVAGHOṢA'S EPICS



Deva & Asura War, British Museum

Xiaoqiang “Alex” Meng is a PhD candidate in South Asian and Tibetan Studies at the Institute for Area Studies, Leiden University, the Netherlands. He received his BA in history (on Mongol-Yuan dynasty and maritime silk road in the 13th–14th centuries) from Nankai University in 2017 and his MA in Buddhist studies (on Kṣemendra’s *Bodhisattvāvadānakalpalatā*) from Fudan University in 2020. Afterwards, he came to the Netherlands to pursue a PhD degree in Buddhist Studies. Sponsored by Khyentse Foundation and the J. Gonda Fund Foundation, he concentrated on Buddhist cosmology and mythology, specifically on the myth of the war between the gods and the Asuras, based on the Buddhist scripture *Saddharmasmṛtyupasthānasūtra*. He has also studied in the program “MA in South Asian Languages and Cultures: Jainism and its Languages” at Ghent University and made an academic stay at the Departments of Buddhology and Tibetology and Indian Studies (BTK), Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest.

Asuras have long been depicted as primordial antagonistic beings in the religious, mythological, and folkloric traditions of South Asia. Buddhism engaged with these figures early on and regarded Asuras as warlike demons perpetually in conflict with the gods. This gave rise to the Deva-Asura war (*devāsurasamgrāma*) motif, which persisted throughout the history of Buddhist literature. This talk focuses on how Aśvaghoṣa, the well-known Buddhist poet, presents the Asuras in his epics, the *Buddhacarita* and *Saundarananda*, at the beginning of the first millennium CE. Through close readings of four sets of verses from these two works, we attempt to discern the strategies and approaches by which early Indian Buddhists appropriated, localized, and “domesticated” the figure of the Asura and the motif of the Deva-Asura war. This further serves as a cultural, epistemic, and intellectual backdrop for the development of the Buddhist cosmological traditions and the *Saddharmasmṛtyupasthānasūtra*, of which the Asuras and the Deva-Asura war are inevitable components.

**Thursday, May 07, 2026 @ 17.00**

**Location: Lokaal 3.30 - Camelot,  
Blandijn, Campus Boekentoren**

**9000 Gent**

All are welcome. The Gandhāra Corpora Lecture Series is in-person and hybrid online. Please register for the series through this Google Form: <https://forms.gle/TwffQCPuVipUpMvk6> (or through the QR code above).



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Contact Prof. Dr. Charles DiSimone

[charles.disimone@ugent.be](mailto:charles.disimone@ugent.be)

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